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DOGTOWN COMMON

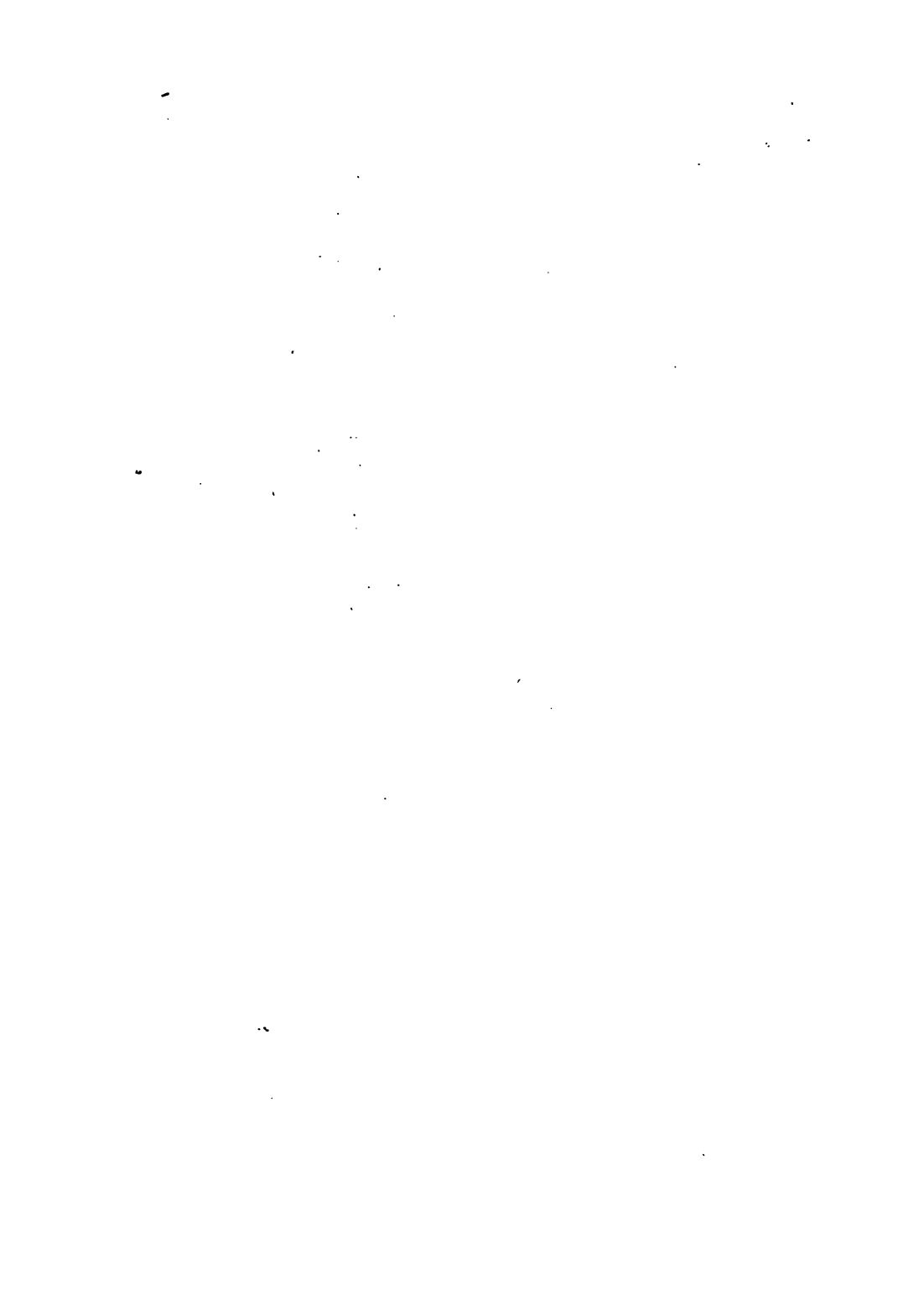


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DOGTOWN COMMON

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DOGTOWN COMMON

I

Inland among the lonely cedar dells
Of old Cape Ann, near Gloucester by the sea,
Still live the dead—in homes that used to be.

All day in dreamy spells

They tattle low with tongues of tinkling cattle
bells,

Or spirit tappings of some hollow tree,
And there, all night—all night, out of the
dark—

They bark—and bark.

No highroad winds by that deserted way;
But on a dingy map in the town hall
At Gloucester, one may read upon the wall:
 "Old road from Sandy Bay
Up through the woods to 'Squam the meeting-
 house."—Today
That horse-road is a rabbit-track, so small
The ghost of Sabbath pilgrim there would fail
 His ancient trail.

Yet often a footloose pilgrim by that track
Still climbs the cape through bog and tangled
 vine
Up granite boulders, where by some green pine
 He pauses and looks back
Toward the blue summer sea where gull-white
 schooners tack,
And snuffs keen smells of berry-bush and brine
On the warm wind, and harkens the noon-weary
 Chime of the veery.

From Pigeon Cove three miles back in the wood
The boulders heap up in a wild moraine—
Gray ruined tabernacles of the rain
 And starry solitude:
A Stonehenge of the storms that Druid glaciers
 hewed
In supplication to the primal pain,
While yet the world groaned in the mortal
 throes
 From which man rose.

There lie the lonely commons of the dead—
The houseless homes of Dogtown. Still their
 souls
Tenant the bleak doorstones and cellar holes
 Where once their quick loins bred
Strong fisher men who fought with storms at
 the masthead,
And women folk who took their bitter toll
Of death, with only their old dogs to be
 A memory.

They took that bitter toll, and bitter thought
Cankered their mateless hours. Dark phan-
tasies,
Hatched of long-brooding winter silences,
 Stretched their starved spirits taut
With mystic yearnings toward forbidden sins,
 which wrought
Their ban from holy communion. One of these,
Last of the witches, pinched with spirit-hunger,
 Was Tammy Younger.

Long after Salem days she cherished the lore
Old Cotton Mather cursed. She knew the clink
Of sieve and shears, and how to brew dire drink
 Of foxberry leaves with gore
Of new-stuck swine. Full many a godless
 grudge she bore
To make in church a deacon gape or blink,
While she at home would scratch his puppet
 with bristles
 Of prickly thistles.

And when she died, late in that stormy night
While neighbor Hodgkins labored in his kitchen
Matching the coffin boards to bury the witch in,
 And rubbed the walnut bright
With beeswax, sudden it thundered, and the
 candlelight
Guttered in dark, and "Wife, come here! It's
 twitchin',"
He called. "I won't!" his goody shrieked, all
 clammy;
 "It's her—it's Tammy!"

So where the "Parting Path" splits at Whale's
 Jaw
The berry-pickers pass her hearth and tell
Old yarns of Tam the Witch, and what befell
 Of weird ordeal and awe
Young Judy Rhines, her niece, whose lips no
 wildrose haw
Could match for redness, till they quivered pale
As leaf-ash when John Wharf, the minister,
 First looked at her.

II

That was the night, long after sun had set,
When Peter Bray and Stephen Lurvey started
With seven girls to find where the path parted.

Two miles from where they met,
Dark Tucker, Poll and Nabby Morgan were
game yet,
Lyd Muzzy, Peg and Liz, too, were stout-
hearted,
But Molly Millet heard a barking sound—
And turned bang-round.

"Here, Moll, come back! Your lantern's
smokin' out.

The moon ain't ris' yet. Whar you goin'?"

"Home."

"What for? What ails ye?" "Nothin' don't."

"Oh, come! No time to turn about

Now; now we're nigh-most thar. Hark yonder."

"Hush! Don't shout;

You needn't shout." "She's scart," laughed

Nabby. "No'm,

I ain't." "What of? That's jest the widders'

bitches,

The Dogtown witches."

"Witches!" screamed Moll, and out her lantern
went.

Peter haw-hawed his heartful; Peggy giggled.

Moll slipped a foot: down in the dark she

wiggled,

Still bawling. Stephen lent

His light to Lyddy: "Here, Lyd,—hold it!"

Over he bent

And picked Moll up, all mud. "I never
sniggled
An eel as slick as you, Moll." Moll drew tight.
She tugged the light

From Lyddy's hand. "I'm goin' home, you—
you—!
I'm goin' now, and I'll tell Master Wharf
The Godless way *you're* goin'." "You're clean
off,
Moll. Whar we're goin' to
Is old Aunt Tammy's, to see Judy." "Judy who?
Your Judy Rhines! I guess folks know what
trough
She feeds outen—the slut!" "Stop thar!" rang
Peter;
"Wait till you meet 'er

Afore ye stuff your mouth with that mistake."
"I wouldn't meet no one that daresn't stand
In the Lord's meetin' house. I'd cut my hand

Right off, ruther than shake
 A finger of her." "Molly Millet, for good sake,"
 Cried Lyddy, "quit, and come. Pete says it's
 grand.

She'll tell our fortunes." "Peter's—sure! How
 sweet!"

"Watch here!" growled Pete,

"You knew first-off whar we was aimin' for;
 And what's a spookin'-party without spooks
 And gals and sparkin'. As for Judy—"
 "Zooks!"

Snapped Peg, "Moll's fearful sore
 Jest 'cause we snickered." "She don't need to
 set no store
 By snickers, doos she? Jedgin', though, by 'er
 looks,
 She's goin' back." "I be!" "Haw! Be ye so?
 Wall, go, then, go!

"Go tattle! Take Steve's lantern for your
 moon

And serenade your minister." "I will."
And Molly went.—Far sounding from Fox Hill
Still rose the barking croon
Of Dogtown.—Stephen spat, and whistled a
hymn tune;
The girls drew close, like pigeons bill to bill
In a seed-loft; but Peter, chewing wrath,
Turned up the path.

He swung their only lantern on its pole.
"Come on!" he called. The lantern hardly lit
A yard around him with a circling slit
Of light like a hearth coal,
But through the iron-peakèd top a triple hole
Gleamed with three goblin eyes, that winked
a fit
Of wabby spangles when his pole went teeter.
"Come on!" called Peter,

And strode ahead. He was a brawny seaman,
Was Peter Bray, and lusty in his pranks.

He fed a wild-oats stallion in his shanks,
And when he played the freeman
With girls ashore, and looked at Steve, and said
 "Let be, man!"
Stephen *let be*; for Pete had stormed it on "the
 Banks,"
And Steve knew well there was no longshore
 huffer
 Dared call Pete bluffer.

So, like a covey of pullets when Sir Cock,
High treading air, clucks in his gizzard, all
The girls came tiptoe-scrambling to the call
 Of Peter—full in flock
With Stephen for their bantam. Over ridge,
 up rock,
By pitch-dark woodland and dim pasture wall,
They followed his goblin light and the far
 belling
 Toward Tammy's dwelling.

III

In Tammy's house the clock was twanging
Nine.

The clock-moon eyes stared blindly on the
gloom.

One candle on the hearthstone lit the room.

There, dim in candleshine

And deep in yawning chimney-place, Tam bent
her spine

On a low trundle-stool, to ply the loom
Of rug-work on her lap. She bent more near.

"Judy! Come here."

Judy stood leaning at the window-sill.
An irised pane ghosted her portrait there:
Guled round with rusty-golden of her hair
 Her shadow face was still.
The dark tick-tacked; a cricket bored his elfin
 drill;
A drowsy chimney-swallow waked somewhere;
Outdoors grum barkings died away, and then
 Began again.

“Judy! Come here!” “Oh, Aunt, why do they
 bark?
I can’t endure to hear ’em.” “Come, I said,
Come here! Quit mindin’ yonder on the dead.
 Lor’ knows they make us cark
And care enough, let ’lone us hankerin’ to hark
Their yelps.” The tattered caul on Tammy’s
 head
Shook; her mouth wrinkled feebly in a flier.
 “See now; see here.—”

Tam bowed the broken spindle of her face
And clawed with brittle fingers in her lap.—
Like a lean winter elm, she was, whose sap
 Is shrunken beyond trace,
Or like some cellar insect, pale in a dank place,
That lurks beneath a musty cider-tap,
And reaches long and trembling antennæ
 To hear and see.

“Feel now—my rug: ’t is spoilt. This hank is
 tore
Clean through the weave.” “Likely a mouse
 has been
And gnawed it.”—“Mouse! I’ll give his tarnal
 sin
 Come-up-ance! Twice afore
He’s spoilt my work to spite me; but he’ll pay
 his score.
I’ll stick a bramble in his puppet’s skin
Till he prays God to ease his itchin’ fur.
 Mouse?—Minister!”

“The minister! Why, Aunt Tam, what d’ ye mean?”

“Hark, Judy Rhines! I’ve told ye what a sort Folks called my Granny Luce: “Old Witch,” fer short.

I was come seventeen
When Granny died. She larned me all she’d
larned and seen,
And peck o’ trouble the church folks gave her
for ’t,
Till soon they called *me* witch, and druv away
My work and pay—

“Yes, like as they’ve done *you* now, ’cause o’ me,
All ’ceptin’ what we arn by secret ways.—
Old Elder Coit was courtin’-spruce them days.
He kep’ me company,
But quit when I was banned; and, all these
years long, he
Has set the min’ster ’gin me when he prays.
So now he’s set John Wharf, the God-believin’,
To curse my weavin’,

“And now—now—” Tammy gulped; her thin
 voice snapped
And crackled, moaning. Judy crooned: “There
 —there—”
And raised her up in her deep elbow-chair,
 And smoothed the shawl that wrapped
Her shrivelled body. Tam’s weak head went
 nod; she napped.
Her black shawl felt the sheen of Judy’s hair.—
The cricket drilled in ores of black and gold
 And young and old.—

Low seated on the trundle, Judy stirred.
She winced with her left arm. The arm was
 slung
Loose in a band of cloth. Her right she hung
 Where the hearth-candle blurred
Her eyes, that gazed unblinking. Nothing
 mortal heard
The music of her thoughts. They had no
 tongue

Even for herself as, will-less, her right hand
Groped in the sand

Beside the hearth and clutched a small charred
stick.

Slantwise her fingers held it, like a quill.

Slowly it swirled in aimless orbits, till

The sharp black point went *crick*

On the gray stone. Wide-eyed, she stared on
the flame-wick.

Below, the charry pencil stirred—was still—

Crept on once more; then—idly as a mote

On air—*it wrote*.

“Judy! What ails ye, Judy?” quavered Tam.

The will-less hand still wrote, the void eyes
stared.

“What’s that? Where are ye, Judy?” Tammy
flared

Chin-forward.—“Here I am,

Here, aunt: What is it?” “Aye, *what* is it—
makin’ sham

Or figgers?" "Figgurs?" Still her soul was
snared
In twilight, like a child that stumbles from day
In some dark way

Seeking a lost thing. "Figgurs?" Now her
eyes
Slow focussed on the hearthstone. "Read!
Read off
Yonder what's wrote." She read: "'T is I,
John Wharf."

And then, still slower, twice:
"'T is I, *John Wharf.*"—"Ha, him! So, did I
tell ye wise?
'T is him that persecutes us with his scoff.
His mark! He's owned up now." Tam
chuckled, wild.
But Judy—smiled.

Whenever Judy smiled, roses came out
And sorry weather took another seeming.

When Judy knew she smiled, that ruddy gleam-
ing
Put utterly to rout
Old cankerworms, and sudden buds began to
pout.—
“That’s funny, Aunt! I must have been
adreaming,”
She smiled; and smooched the writing with her
foot
Back in the soot.

Yet in her smile a pallid yearning hid,
And in her presence splendors far away
Lingered in afterglow—gray-rose, rose-gray.
“Aye, sign his name, he did,
In black! ’T was Satan’s chalk he borrered.”
“God forbid,
Aunt Tam, that he—” She stopped short in
her say,
For “Judy! Judy! Judy Rhines!” it sang.—
The door went *bang*.

IV

Then silence.—Judy pulled the latch. / She
 peered
And shrunk back. Through the doorway, hulking
 tall,
Loomed Peter, like a bullock from a stall.
 The teeth in his red beard
Laughed white; above his grin the goblin eye-
 balls leered.—
“Halloa, thar!” “Peter Bray!—you?” “Me,
 and all
These little shiners in a net. Steve ketched
 'em,
And so we fetched 'em

“Along to show ye. Come in, gals!” “Who’s
 there?”

Shrilled Tammy. "Jest it's Pete and Stephen,
Aunt;
They're bringin' comp'ny." "Comp'ny! What
they want
This late o' night?" "Don't scare
Yerself, Aunt Tam," piped Peter. "We dropt
in ter share
Some vittals with ye. Not stay long we shan't.
Here's pie—and bread—and rum—and barb'ry
jam."
"Come in," said Tam.

"Come in. Set down," said Judy. In they came
And groped amid the dusk for stool and settle.
But Peter stood. His brawn was all in fettle,
And Judy was a flame
To sear flesh, till the tethered stallion in his
frame
Slavered his bit. He felt her beauty's nettle
Sting in his loins, and with her passing look
His being shook.

She passed him, bringing newly lighted dips
For the newcomers. Quick, he reached to aid,
But she was quicker. Almost he had laid
 Hand on her finger-tips
But they eluded, and the light shaft from her
 lips
Was glanced to Stephen. "Steve, can't ye
 persuade
Peter to sit? What ails the man, so moody?"
 "Ask that o' Judy,"

Winked Stephen. (The girls giggled.) "He's
 come up
To git his fortune told." "So have us all,"
Joined Peter; "Aunty Tam will make a haul
 After she's took her sup
O' rum here.—Spook some coffee-grindin's in
 your cup,
Heigh, Aunty, won't ye?" Peter plucked Tam's
 shawl.
He slipped a shiny coin and, stooping near,
 Spoke in her ear:

"Leave Judy read *my* hand; you tend the rest."
Tam coughed, and bit the coin with a blunt
tooth.

A little coin, to tell a witch's truth
Must take her chemic test
To pass, for witch's spittle is the Alchahest
Of lover's lead and silver.—Couth is couth,
And silver passes muster: Tammy's squint
Gave Peter hint.

He loitered toward the cupboard, lingering
there.

"Young folks," leered Tam, "I'm old, and I ain't
able

To stir me round like you be. Shove that table
Snug up here next my chair,
So you kin all set nigh—so fashion. Judy,
where

Be them new coffee-grindin's?" "In the gable-
Cupboard." "Then git 'em." Peter bulked
before

The cupboard door.

"I'll help ye." "No, ye needn't." "Yes, I need!
Your left arm's hurted." "Is it? Who's complainin'?"

"What ails it?" "Askin'—*you*, that done the sprainin'!"

"Me done it!—When?" She freed
Her shoulder from his clutch. "Now, Peter,
jest you heed:

That's how you done it last time." "Pish!

'T ain't painin',

Or else ye wouldn't laugh." "Oh, wouldn't I?"

—"By Gorry,

Judy, I'm sorry!"

"Then leave me pass!"—She found a cannister
And fetched it to the table. "Ah! let see,"
Sniffed Tam, and smelled inside: "Aye, here
they be.

Now don't you make us stir,

Peter. Here ain't no room for more. You
set with her

Yonder. My Judy knows more tricks nor me

In these concerns. "But, Aunt, I'd ruther—"

"Nay,

Do what I say,

"There ain't no room here." Tammy stretched

a claw

And pinched Nab Morgan by her slender wrist.

"Here, birdie; hold these grindin's in your fist

And feed 'em in your craw;

Now spit 'em in this cup."—A shiver of cold

awe

Silenced the girlish gigglings. With a twist

Tam turned the cup, and squinted long inside.

But Peter eyed

Judy, and Judy—Peter. Sidling slow,

They sauntered toward the window-bench. She

gave

A twitchy laugh. "Well, Peter, you'll behave?"

"Sure I'll behave! Ye know

How folks behave that's after what they want."

"And so

You want your fortune told." "Not in my
grave

I don't. I want it now—right on the spot,
Not told—but *got!*

"You've got it for me, Judy. Come, go shares,
And open up the hatches. Let her bust!

What good's a fortun' stowed away for trust?"

"And you call this behavin'? Where's
Your hand? Set still." He reached it, scraggy
with red hairs,

Tattooed with purple anchors. Stifled lust
Throbbled in his pulse, as Judy turned it, calm,
To read the palm.

The calloused hide was crinkled hard in seams
Swarted with tarry grime and creosote
From many a dry-dock'd keel and whaling-boat

Oar-pulled in ocean streams.—

"So, Judy! Kin you riddle thar what kind o'
dreams

Goes crazy in a man that's ben afloat
 Nine moons at sea, and never day nor night
 A gal in sight?"

"You ain't afloat now, Peter." "No, I ain't;
 I'm in deep water, Jude; I'm overboard
 And drownin', prayin' mighty on the Lord
 To save!" "Don't gasp so faint;
 Your life-line's lookin' strong." "Aye, Judy,
 you're the saint,
 You've got 't—my life-line: you kin pull me
 shore'ard
 If you jest keep aholt—take me in tow—
 Never leave go!"

"Leave go yourself, Pete. Quit; you're hurtin'."
 "Will ye,
 Oh, will ye, Judy dear?" "Oh, will I what?"
 "Give me the drink I'm dyin' for!—If not,
 By God, I guess I'll kill ye,
 And you kin axe that drink whar Dogtown
 devils grill ye

In hell.—Ah, God forgive the drowndin'
thought
I've sworn.—See, Jude; see, here's a silver
shillin'!
Now be ye willin'?"

His words came panting, whispered, but their
tone
Thundered in Judy's soul. Almost she cried
Aloud, but strangers near constrained her pride.
She sat as still as stone.
Unhearing, the awe-struck girls harked-on to
Tammy's drone
Where close she held her cup, to peer inside
And with the coffee-grounds prognosticate
Their listened fate.

"Will ye? I'm waitin'!" Thick he breathed
and hard.—
Then flashed a blinding pain, and choking grips
Crushed on her teeth the blood-flower of her
lips.

Her mind went reeling, scarred.

“Will ye?” “I—will.” “Then come. The
back-shed door ain’t barred.

Come quick.” “Wait!” “Why?”—One of the
lighted dips

She lifted in his face.—“What for a light?

There’s moon tonight.”

“Look in the flame. Set still.” “What for, the
flame?”

“Look in the flame.” “What for?” His look
went lost.

Nearer she held it, till the eyes were crossed.

“What for?”—His breathing came

Quicker, then slower—slow. One arm went
limp; his frame

Shuddered, then stiffened hard. His face was
frost.

Her eyes were litten coals of hate and shame.—

“Look—in—the—flame.”

V

Who knows what messages Tomorrow gets
From charnelled Yesterday?—what quivering
thread

Conjoins the buried quick and buried dead?

Who knows, when memory sets

In dark, what lurid afterglows of old regrets

Still linger ghostly where the light has sped?

Or what blind seeds of destiny life sows

In death—who knows?

Steve Lurvey spoke. "What's thar ye see inside
The cup, Aunt Tam?" The candle dips shone
dim.

Nab Morgan nudged; Steve smiled; she smiled
at him.—

"I see a weddin' bride
And groom, a fishin' schooner leavin' at low tide
A lightnin' storm—a drowned man's white
limb—
A woman waitin' home, with daylight darkin'
And drownd things barkin'."

"Come 'way, Steve; please come 'way!"

"Hush! Don't take on.—

Who larnt ye see sech-like things, Aunt?" "My
Granny."

"Your—who?" "My Gran, Luce George: she
sees 'em canny."

"But she's ben dead-an'-gone
These years ago!" "And so she has. She's
over yon,

But she can stick her fingers through the
cranny
And rouse me up outen my dozin' naps
With 'er knuckle-raps."

"Her raps?" "Aye, on the table: twice, and
thrice,
Until I axe her what she wants." "And could
We axe, and would she answer?" "P'raps she
would,
If you kin pay her price."

Tam squinted sharp at Steve. Age is not over
nice
With youth, when youth is in his craving mood
Of curiosity. "Oh, we'll pay score,"
Said Steve, "and more!"

"Then lay your hands and tetch the fingertips,
Like so." Lyd, Poll and Lizzy touched; they
tittered.

The other four laid hands. The smooth grain
glittered
Dimly. "Blow out the dips."

Steve blew them out. Their faces blurred in
wan eclipse.

Out of the dusk the chimney-swallow twittered
And Judy's one flame burned: It did not falter
On that strange altar

Where Peter's image like an idol froze
Before the silent neophyte of hate
Holding her vengeance' rapt novitiate.

Backward her shadow rose
Over the walls and rafters, deep engulfing those
Round the hush table. Half incorporate
She seemed, and held her flame in Peter's
stare
Like one in prayer.

Across the shadowed circle Tam kept tab
Over the sitters. From her elbow-chair
She wrote with crooked finger on the air
And becked toward shrinking Nab
Weird signs, like willow patterns on a grave-
stone slab.

“Gran knows my hand when I kin write it fair.
She’ll answer when she reads it, twice for Nay
And thrice for Yea.

“Gran holds her head atilted to one side
'Cause in her jowl she has a twitchin’ tic;
So when she comes ye’ll know it in the nick,
For Gran herself will bide
In one that’s here.—Aye, here she’s comin’
now!” Tam wried
Her neck toward Nabby. Stephen’s heart grew
sick.

Nab’s head was tilted sideways, and her eye
Jerked twitchingly.

The others held their aching fingers taut
Upon the table board. The board went *tap*.
They hardly breathed. Twice more they heard
it rap.

“Yea, yea, ye’re quick as thought,
Gran Luce. Give ye good even!” Steve’s quick
hearing caught

The whisper-gasped "Good even" through the
 gap
 Of Nabby's twisting mouth.—"Yea, now ye're
 come,
 'T is welcome home,

"And tell us, Gran, who have ye fetched to-
 night?

Is it the Murky Man with cock's feet—him
 That flew, last time, out at the chimney rim
 And pulled ye clean from sight
 Along with 'm?"—*One* and *one* it rapped.

"Nay, then, it might
 Be some one godlier mayhap and prim
 Would axe a blessin', without horn nor hoof,
 On my poor roof?"

The silence tingled. Low it knocked, then
 loud:
 Once, twice, thrice. Slow the shadow-door
 swung back.
 Against the night one stood there, all in black,

Bare-headed. A faint cloud
Of quivering moonshine wrapt his body like a
shroud,
And round his hair the risen moon's bright
wrack
Glowed like a halo.—“God His holy Grace
Dwell in this place!”

The table tipped, stools banged, the settle
tumbled.

“Ha-ha!” screamed Tam, “ye’re come, John
Wharf o’ mine,
To own your mark what Satan made ye sign
With brimstone, when he humbled
Your lyin’ tongue.” The scared girls squealed
to hide and stumbled.

“I knocked, but no one answered. May the Vine
Of His Salvation strangle in these and thee
God’s Enemy!”

“Aye, aye, it has ’em strangled—deef and dumb.
Look at the gal.” “Nab, Nabby dear!” cried
Steve,

“Tilt up your head.” “Go forth, Apollyon!
Leave

This child.” John touched the numb
Body. Nab choked, and sobbed on Stephen’s
shoulder.—“Come,
Sweety, let’s go!” They went.—“As old as Eve
Thy sin is, woman!” Clutched in trembling rout,
The girls rushed out.

John Wharf turned back to call. Before him
knelt

A young form by a bearded fetich cold.
Her candle flared the mist of rusty gold
That rimmed her face. He felt
Her throbbing quiet and the quickened air, that
smelt
Of ripening grapes in arbor. Ages old
That instant and that kneeling image seemed;
Or else he dreamed.

“’T is I, John Wharf. What mortal sin is here
Of witch’s sorcery? What are these signs?”

“And so ye’re come, John Wharf. I’m Judy Rhines.”—

He looked at her, austere
Yet hesitant, as if he tried to summon clear
Something that beckoned from the pale confines
Of memory—a bright shape far away,
Gray-rose, rose-gray.

“What spell is here that turns warm flesh to stone?

Surely this dwelling is the Devil’s lair!
Who is this man? Why does he sit and stare
So silent, all alone?”

“’T is Peter Bray. Ye’re right. The Devil’s got his own

In Pete.” She touched Pete’s brow. The sullen glare

Kindled. She touched his mouth: “Talk!”—
At her word

The dumb lips stirred

And spluttered, like a rescued drowner strangling.

“Ha! Will ye, Jude? Come on. The backshed door—

’T ain’t barred. Come quick! What for, a light?—What for?—”

His body wrenched; the dangling
Arm straightened up; he winked and winked;
the dark went spangling
With little lighted wicks, that gleamed before
A man’s stern face.—What man?—The minister,
Gazing with *her*,

With her, his Judy Rhines,—gazing at him.
He lurched upon the floor, reaching to shut
Their eyes away. “Who’s thar? By God, you
slut—”

He saw them growing dim.—
“Who’s thar ye’ve got, ye whorin’ strump?”
He seemed to swim

Towards her.—“By crack, jest leave me bag
your scut,
I'll skin ye the rest offen!” He spat foam.
“Peter, go home.”

John eyed him.—“Home!” He winced; he
swore; he went.
His big shape darked the doorway; he was gone.
John yearned toward the young figure:
“Judy”—“John,”
She murmured. Her voice sent
A stealing wonder, like strange wine of sacra-
ment
Through his wrought spirit. Where her candle
shone
Sudden it fell, and Judy lay there, white
In the moon's light.

Tam scuttled from her corner. “Lawks! she's
fainted.

It takes the likes o' you to fetch bad luck
 On me and mine and run our house amuck!"
 "Witch, 't is thyself hath tainted
 This wretched child, whose soul had otherwise
 been sainted
 By her young innocence. Look; she has struck
 Her arm; 't is wounded." "Nay 't was Peter
 done 't
 By sprainin' on't

"With his sweetheartin' last time he come
 here."—
 "Judy, look up! Poor Judy,—are you better?"
 Feebly she smiled. Her smile was a bright
 fetter
 To hold his spirit near
 To hers, for her salvation. "Judy, never fear;
 All this shall pass." Tam scowled. "John
 Wharf, you let 'er
 Be! I kin tend what's mine by blood and bone.
 You tend your own!"

"Mine own are where the sick have need of me.
Where is her bed?" "In thar—the gable room."
John raised the drooping body. Through the
gloom

He bore it tenderly
Where Tammy groped ahead and mumbled.
Stooping, he
Laid her on quilted softness dark as tomb.
"And are you better now?" Her voice breathed
deep:

"Yes; now I'll sleep."

He tiptoed back. Tam grumbled to her rest.
He listened: all the inner room was still.
The hour twanged: the cricket answered shrill.
His spirit was the guest
Of presences that thronged the tumult of his
breast,
But quiet was his shadow on the sill
And lingered there, till moonlight paled in
dawn;
Then it was gone.

VI

Between late August and the equinox
Hovers a dreamy season frail and fleet:
Then slender-falling water is very sweet
 To hear among great rocks,
Tinkling in golden tones the calling cat-bird
 mocks
Beside a pool, where willows sway to meet,
And, long ago, young Judy saw her face in
 That bright-dark basin.

She saw her face, and laughed to see it there
Lit by the scarlet flames of cardinal flowers.
Up the inverted sky in tumbling showers
Cool sunshine splashed her hair
Bright copper in water-blueness. All of old
despair
And dreads of night had lost their eerie powers
Where glad she passed along her morning trail
To fill her pail

With brook water, for Tam to boil her tea.
In dipped the pail: The current-poising trout
Flicked off, but up she dipped a minnow out
And spilled him. On her knee
She groped amid the ferns to save him. Suddenly
She felt her hand touched warm. She turned
about.—
“Fishing ashore?” “Ah, Master Wharf,—it’s
you!”
“What shall I do

“Now that I’ve caught him?” On his open
hand

He held the minnow. “Please! oh, leave him go.”
John slipped him back. They watched him
dart below.

“How helpless on strange land
He is—how strong in his true home! You
understand?”

Her eyes looked up. “Last night was strange,
you know.

This little fish hath preached a parable.
Remember it well.”

He lifted the pail. “And are *you* going home,
Judy? Or are you lost upon the way
That leads where in the dark last night you lay?”

“That’s where I live, Sir.” “Come,
Sit down. That is not where you live. Long
since, in Rome,
St. Paul revealed where all of us who pray
For life shall live. Dear child, we live in faith
And not in death:

"In faith and hope and love; these three in one
Are God. In Him we live." "The dead can
live

I guess, Sir, without God. 'Least, I believe
They can." "He sent his Son
To tell us otherwise." "Whatever have we done
For dead folks, then, to plague us?" "Devils
give

Those fears to plague you." "Nay, Sir, 'tain't
all sham.

You axe Aunt Tam:

"Her Granny Luce had larned us more than
tricks.

'T was her that helped me to turn Peter cold.
Oh, Sir, don't tell Aunt Tammy that I told:

'T was her that burnt the ricks
Of Neighbor Coit last year. She trimmed our
candle-wicks

And told Gran Luce to fire his new sheep-fold.
Oh, Sir, I hate the awful things us do;

But, Sir, it's true!"

“Nay, Satan is Delusion, he is lies,
And Faith destroys Delusion. Put away
Satan!” “How *can* I do it, what you say—
 Make this world otherwise
When so it is—*his* world? Even you it won’t
 surprise
May be, when you remember yesterday:
What time last evenin’ did ye guess you’d come
 Up to my home?”

“What hour? Let see: I think ’t was nine
 o’clock
For Molly Millet told me—” “Only *her*?
And was there nothin’ else that made ye stir?
 Three three’s is nine: her knock.
Who was it called ye, when ye felt the spirit
 shock
And answered plain: ‘’T is I, John Wharf’?—
 Ah, Sir,
Forgive me!” “Yea, but I remember now:
 Judy,—’t was *thou*!

"I stood alone beside my study door.
Molly had gone, but yet I felt no sign
To go. Just then the clock was telling Nine,
 And dimly there before
My sight *you* rose from a low trundle on the
 floor.
Your eyes were sad and pleaded unto mine.
I spoke, and in a mist of rose-and-gray
 You paled away.—

"Then I went forth to Dogtown." John looked
 round
At Judy, where they rested on a stone.
His young, grave face grew old: it sought her
 own,
 Then stared upon the ground.
The drip of falling water made a dreamy
 sound.
"Oh, Sir,—John Wharf—forgive me! If I'd
 known,
I'd never so have sinned." "What sin was thine
 Also was mine;

“And if it be that Satan’s snare entwines
Us both, then we must break it, both, together
And seek in prayer a bond of holier tether.

O Judy—Judy Rhines,
What witchcraft weaves you round that Christ
the Lord enshrines
Its charnel in such wonder? Tell me whether
I pray, or sin, that—looking on your face—
I pray for grace!”

“Nay, never pray towards me. Ye see this arm
Last night was sprained, and now ’t is healed,
I guess:

Sir, you’re a minister; leave me confess.
’T was Peter done the harm
Ahankerin’ for more; but me, I worked the
charm

Or else he would ’a lusted for me less.
O Sir, the dead—the livin’ dead—they clutch
My heart so much,

“And make my days so eerie, and Aunt Tam
Has heavied my nights and days with hatin’
things

So long, sometimes my spirit takes and flings
All thinkin’ off, like flam,
And jest goes livin’, lovin’, naked like I am,
Feelin’, and makin’ others feel, what brings
Their love upon me. So what makes me glad
Made Peter bad;

“But me, that made him so, ain’t I the same
In sinnin’? Ain’t I, Sir?” John’s life-blood
surged

Within him. “Child, the charnel must be
purged—

Our hearts be cleansed. The blame
Is Antichrist’s, who taints our glory with his
shame;

But I—O God!” He stopped. His face was
scourged

By inward lightnings, which he smothered under
To curb their thunder.

“Why don’t ye say the words?” “What words?”

“The ones

That’s in your mouth.” He gazed at her, con-
strained.

“*He who would cleanse must be himself un-
stained,*

But I am soiled.” (—Her tones

Her looks were *his*.) “Weren’t them the
words?” “What dark touchstones

Were yours, to fathom what my mind con-
tained?

How could you tell my thoughts, and speak
them so?”

“Sometimes I know

“The words before folks speak. I hear them all
Out loud, like some one told me how they ran.”

“Who told you these?” “I guess ’t was her—
dead Gran.”

“Let be! Let be! The scall

Of Satan shends thee, child. His venom can
bespawl

God's cleanest shrine, and make of hallow'd man
An ulcered thing. Cast out this prying evil!
'T was he, the Devil,

"Who gave thee power to read my secret
thought,
And drew last night my spirit to thee.—Yea,
I, too, am soiled. I, too, was led away
By his dark hand, and brought
To hell's abyss: 'T is so in secret we are
caught
And damned."—"How can we 'scape him?"—
"We can pray,
And Christ, who heareth all beyond the grave,
May cleanse and save."

John took her hand. "Pray with me, Judy
child."
In crinkled fern they sank on bended knee.
Above them glimmered a green rowan tree
Red flecked with berries wild;

A myrtle warbler flashed, the summer morning
 smiled;
Kingscandle burned pale tapers tremblingly,
And falling water, falling smooth and slender,
 Made music tender.

“Dear Christ, who rose unblemished from the
 dead
To heal the sins of Thy forbidden fruit,
Let not Thy secret Enemy pollute
 This child. Yea, shield her head
From God the Father’s wrath, or let it fall in-
 stead
On me, her minister.—Our sins commute!”
“Nay, when we’re tryin’ to shed our sins, like
 now,
 Lord, tell us how!”

Cried Judy; and she added, speaking shy:
“O Master Wharf, I don’t know jest to pray

To Him. I never larned. I ruther *you'd* say
What's right, and then I'd try
To foller." John rose up. He raised her
silently
And looked long in her face.—“Will you obey
What's right?” “I'll try.” “Then follow me.
Come home,” said he.

John took the pail. Across the dappled brook
He stepped—a pensive shadow, silent, black.
Behind him Judy watched the awkward back
Bend forward like a rook
Stooping from stone to stone; but where her
yearning look
Followed his form along the climbing track,
She thought a shape so grand in power and awe
She never saw.

VII

A little window with a wooden door
Peeped from the back of Tammy's cabin.
There
Tam lurked when neighbors passed, to catch
them where
They crossed the bridge before
Her trap: Pop open she pulled it with a string,
to explore
Their teams, and make their oxen stand and
stare
With tongues lolled out, till they paid toll, poor
lumpkins,
In corn or pumpkins.

And while the gossips tattled on, they said
No basketful of pickerel, fresh from creek,
Was safe to pass that spot, but Tam would
wreak

Wrath on the owner's head
Till he went empty-handed home in angry
dread;
And children crept by, lest she hear the squeak
Of the old trestle-beam, and stick her cap
Out at the trap

And wag it till their little heads went noddy.—
So creaked the trestle now, as Judy passed
With John. Wide flew the shutter. "Wall, at
last!

How long'll ye keep a body
Waitin'? Ye know I want my tea afore my
toddy."

Tam's face peered out.—"Now, Judy Rhines,
how da'st

Ye fetch that man along of ye?—John Wharf,
Jest you keep off

My premises! Come round the front door, gal.”
Slam shut the window. Judy followed John
Around the lilac bush, where he set down
 The water-pail. “What shall
We do, Sir?” Tam leaned from the door. “You
 tattertal,
Keep off, I tell ye. Leave my bucket yon
And settle your own concerns—with Solomon
 Grundy
Was buried o’ Sund’y!”

Tam coughed. She daubed her thumb, and
 sniffled snuff
Out of her withered palm. John flashed a
 frown.—
“Thomazine Younger, you have wronged this
 town.

Our folks have borne enough
Of your clandestine heresies. Their evil scruff
Corrupts our youth and soils our fair renown.
The elders of my church have bade me warn,
 Lest you suborn

“The innocent to learn your—” “Ho, your
godly
Elders! ’Tis Master Coit,—Zorobabel,
Ye’re meanin’?—Now leave Harry come from
hell
And fetch his ca’cass bod’ly
Away with him!” “Cease, woman! else it shall
go hardly
With you, if the Elders’ doom must needs
compel
Your peace.—*One* child you shall not keep from
Christ.
It hath sufficed

“For Judy here to serve your errant will
Unwitting where it led. But now no more!
Her eyes are opened to the light; the door
Of that seductive ill
Is closed; and she shall never cross its darkling
sill
Again.” “Not cross my sill—won’t Judy?
Lor’!

But you *aire* turnin' Prophet Jeremiah!
Come; call him liar,

"Judy, and git us riddance of his clatter."
"Speak, Judy child: You promised to obey
The right. Now, will you choose?"—She mur-
mured "Yea,"

And stopped. She heard the patter
Of chipmunks on dry leaves; they seemed to
chase and scatter
Her thoughts with little frisking tails in play.
"Which—Christ, or Tammy?"—"Bein' like I
am,
I'll stick by Tam,

"I guess." John stared at her; but Tammy
cackled
Loud as a lean hen-mother ruffed with spite.
"But you—you promised to obey the right."
"I did."—The chipmunks crackled
Loose shingles on the house roof. Judy's
tongue was shackled
To heavy weights upon her heart. Her sight

Turned dim. "The right what we was talkin'
of—
Ain't it—to love?"

"It is."—"So, then, may be I didn't know.
I guess I don't love Christ, but Tam—I do.
Only if you'd a-said—not Him, but—" "Who?"

The quick-caught breath, the glow
Of heart-flame on the cheek, where rose-lights
come and go—

Tam's old sight was too blear to catch their
cue.

She called "Come in, Jude!" Judy bent her
head.

"Goodbye," she said,

And stooped to pick a gray flower at her feet.
Above its clustered hearts her blurred eyes
shone
Fast winking, while she handed it to John.

“It grows right here, and sweet
To smell. They call it Life Everlasting.” His
heart beat
Quick pain. He smelled faint fragrance. She
was gone.
“O Christ!” he prayed, “O flower of thirst and
fasting—
Life Everlasting!”

VIII

To walk in summer quiet soothes the heart
That strains to burst the leash-cord of its limbs:
To walk alone, and chant aloud great hymns
 That make the deep pines start
Their organ-ludes, where lingering orioles take
 part
In lonely intervals: to climb the rims
Of solitary rocks, and find release
 Of power—is peace.

John walked in summer quiet. He walked to
 think
 His pent soul free of thoughts. He walked to
 fill
 The ache of thought with beauty. He lay still
 High on the shelving brink
 Of a huge boulder's roofbeam, where he heard
 the clink
 Of the quarryman's hammer call from Railcut
 Hill,
 Tapping to pulses of a spirit tabor
 Love songs of labor.

He lay and saw—upstaring at the sky—
 Visions of Christ the Savior in white flame
 Walking with Judy. Down the blue they came
 And passed him quiet by,
 Conversing with each other low and tenderly.
 She held a small drab flower, and spoke a
 name—

“John,” and she asked: “Why does it grow
in hell
So sweet to smell?”

And following after them, in peaked hats,
Black Elders strutted from a little church.
One muttered: “Don’t tread near them, lest
they smirch
Our gowns.” And one said: “That’s
The child. They say she turns all pretty birds
to bats
About her dwelling. Tell John Wharf to search
The place and see.” And where their shapes
went darking
He heard them barking.

He rose and stared around. Still, far below,
He heard the barking sound. It died away.
He bowed his head. Clutching he kissed the
gray
Flower in his hand. “’T is so!

"T is so!" he whispered, "But Lord God, I did
not know."

Once more he strode on in the summer day,
Where yellow butterflies, bright-wing'd from
bath,
Fluttered his path.

The footpath turned and plunged. He followed
it
Into a barren gulley, bleak as where
Lost Christian strayed and met the Giant
Despair.

He watched a bittern flit
On lumbering wings, to vanish in a swampy
pit
Of cedars. So he passed to balmy air
Along the moor grass, where deep wheel ruts
showed
The old back road.

Across ripe fields he passed, where golden rod
And purple asters mixed in glowing tide.

Dull-orange daisies stared at him, ox-eyed,
And bursting milkweed pod
Spirited white filmy seeds. He watched them
drift toward God
Like his wild thoughts. Then quick he turned
aside
And, climbing, reached the top of Gravel Hill.
There he stood still.

Far off he saw the shores of Ipswich Bay
And Newburyport gleam in the sea's blue fires:
Sweet Newburyport, the town of lovely spires!
There, on hush Sabbath day,
In blue-bright Merrimac the Christ-clean spirits
lay
Their sins, home welcomed with baptismal
choirs.
How often *he* had helped that hallow'd quest—
Their pastor's guest.

“O Faith and Hope and Love!”—The preach-
er's words

Came fresh and strange and wild with mystic
scope.

Under an elm he lay, on a green slope

Where tawny-golden herds

Dreamed-by like hornèd beasts of Revelation.

Birds

Dreamed in the noon. They waked toward
night. "O Hope,"

They sang, "O Faith, and ever-brooding Dove
Of Christ—O Love!"

IX

Song is the soul. Deep in the primal slime
A reptile loved and sang. The hyla's throat,
Evolving seraph wings, still throbs remote
 Through million forms of time
In Philomel's rapt song and Dante's soaring
 rhyme.—

John felt it throbbing now. He heard it float
Up from the pasture earth, primeval, wild,
 Half man, half child:

*"Moon went into poplar tree,
An' star went into blood;—
"O my sin is forgiben an' my soul set free!"—*

So rich

And soft and unctuous it rose, John started
To find the singer. Deep and mellow-hearted
Once more it tuned that pitch
Of gladness. John drew nearer. Standing in
a ditch

Of blue clay, where a load of stones lay carted,
He spied his black bird. "Ha! So that's you,
Tie?" *

"Yas'r, Massa,—me an' I."

*"Meet, O Lord, on de milk-white horse"—Old
Tie*

Blinked her bright eyes and laughed up in the
sun.

Sweat shined her black face, crinkled like a bun.

Her workman's smock was wry,

* An authentic character. See Note, at the end.

And through green tattered breeches a great-
 muscled thigh
 Bulged, as she raised a stone to lay upon
 The new wall she was building—building strong
 Of rock and song:

*"In de mornin' w'en I rise,
 Tell my Jesus howdy, O!*

"Wash my han' in de mornin' glory—" Slaves
 Had pens in Dogtown. After nightfall there
 "Old Ruth" would climb her creaking, outdoor
 stair

Above the stern conclaves
 Of pious Puritans, among whose honored graves
 No crumbling slab betokens anywhere
 "Old Ruth" or "Tie," yet builded of her hand
 The stone walls stand.

*"Drop on, drop on de crown on my head"—
 Ha-ha!
 An' roolly in my Jesus' arm!"—Dis gospel
 hymnin'*

Dat sho' done keep my drownded soul aswim-
min',
An' make dis old crow-bar
Light 's a paddle to row me." "Tell me, Tie,
why are
You happy?" "Me? Cuz, Massa, 'mong de
women
Ise glad Ise man, an' 'mong de man, glad sho'
Ise woman. So

"Ise glad Ise bof togedder an' saved." Tie spat
And chuckled. "Ole Massa Coit done boughten
me
Off de Port Royul ship. He tink, says 'e,
'Dat be strong nigger, dat
Feller,' an' so he setted me to buildin' at
Dese stone wall. Long year while ago dat
be."—
And once more from Tie's throat, primeval,
sweet,
The wild tune beat:

"O my sin is forgiven an' my soul set free!"—

John's heart

Throbb'd with the tune; his voice leaped in
her strain.

They lifted it together—again—again.

Tie took the alto part

And John the tenor. Clear he heard his own
voice start

Echoes that fell from sunset like gold rain

Where round him shone, through red of wild-
rose hips,

The Apocalypse.

Rose hips and barberries, vermillion bright

'Mid green-pale leaves against the pale-green
west:

Rose hips and barberries, and Judy dresst

In dim blue, bending slight

Over the wall, and through a mist of coppery
light

Her round mouth singing.—"Judy?" His hand
presst

His eyes. He faltered: "Judy, is it true?
And this—is you?"

"I heerd you singin' and I come to join
Your hymn. Don't stop—O please!" His eye-
lids shut;
He held that bright face fast. He longed to cut
Her image on a coin
Of gold, or clean new-minted copper, to purloin
And hoard, untouched forever.—"Judy, but
How far you've come from home! The sun will
set
Soon. If you'll let,

"I'll see you back." ('Nay, coin could never
grave
The color of that smile,' he thought; 'Ah, no!
But in her hair ripe barberries—only so
For memory to save
The bloom of her bright spirit!') But the old
black slave

Called: "Goodnight, Massa! Sun he layin'
low,
An' Moon she peepin' ober de wall, so den
Goodnight! Amen!"

And Tie jogged off. Her kinked head, hoar'd
with white,
Bobbed to her ploughhorse pace. Below the
hill
"Sin is forgiven" she was singing still,
And far beyond their sight
"My soul set free!" rose darkling as a dream-
bird's flight
And fell in silence.—"Judy! 'T is God's will:
You heard?" "What, John?" "Our sin for-
given. We
In Christ are free."

"You, John—not me. I chose Tam." "And
your choice
Was right. You followed love. Love is the
Way

Of Christ. Oh, I have followed it all day
Ever since I heard your voice
Saying 'It grows right here,' and gave me, to
rejoice,
His pathflower — *His* — Life Everlasting!"
"Nay,
Don't show it me now. Don't John, I'm 'most
afraid
For what I said."

"Afraid? And shall we be afraid of Love?
You said, if I had said not Him but—*Who?*
I asked; and even while I asked, I knew
Whom you were speaking of:
Of *me*, not Christ! But that were sacrilege
above
All sacrilege, had it not been that you
Saw Christ *through me*—saw Love, who burns
even now
Here in my brow,

“Here in my breast, even *Him!* For I have
learned
This day to know He will not be denied
The dream he seeks. The Bridegroom seeks
his bride,
Nor can his quest be spurned
By Satan’s will. Not Tam your spirit turned
To first—but me, and Christ through me hath
cried
To save you—yea, by Love, and not by Hate,
Who hath no mate,

“By Love, who mateth in the Holy Ghost”—
“No, no! Don’t leave me witch you too, John
Wharf,
Not you! The rest’s enough. God’s sake, keep
off
Your hands! Don’t leave Gran boast
I fetched *you* in her snare.”—“Let dead souls
do their most,
They shall not blight our flower of life, nor
dwarf

The seed it bears." He kissed the small gray
flower.

She felt his power

Quicken her soul with flame, where ruddy light
Of sundown blent their mingled shadows.

"John,

—John!" "Ah, Judy dear!"—A shape came on
Against the coming night

Flinging enormous shadow-limbs. "Ho, thar!
Hold tight!

A shillin'—a silver shillin', Jude! I've won.
Now maybe you're the slut I says, or ain't ye?

By God, I'll paint ye

"Red-scarlet in the meetin'-house for this—
And you, ye thievin', God-believin' cur!

She's mine! I paid my shillin' down for her,
And now you're crimpin' the kiss

I bargained for."—John blazed: "Enough!
God's patience is

Not always meek." "Ho, chuck your minister!
Ye're jest a he-male snoopin' after she,

Like what I be,

“And which on us is picked to be a winner
God ain’t the umpire.” “Listen, Peter Bray—”
“Thanks, Jude! But th’ ain’t no candleshine
by day

“Fer you ter freeze a sinner
Dead stiff agin. So, Johnny Wharf, here goes a
chinner

Fer you!” And hot as hammer, where sparks
spray

The glaring blacksmith, Pete’s sledge-fist de-
livered

His blow. John quivered

Limp in the ditch, face downward in blue clay.
Bright on his chin-bone oozed a reddening clot.
Pete kicked him sideways. “Last time what I
shot

A muskrat, so he lay

Squirmin’. And now, Jude dear, next time I
call, you’ll pay

That little shinin’ silver shillin’ what
I loaned ye. *So long!*—Judy sank upon
The clay by John.

X

Sabbath: How like an angel's voice the bell
Trembles the rhythmic air—an angel, blessing
With peace the soul of passion, and caressing
 The heart where tumults dwell:
Now peace for the living pilgrim, now his part-
 ing knell
Of death, it sounds. Man's days on earth are
 pressing
Onward, and ever as they number Seven
 He turns toward heaven.

Tom Stacy, parish clerk, has tied his nag
Under the shed and reached the meeting house.
The porch key grates. He steps in. A gray
mouse

Goes scurrying zigzag
Across the vestry, while he fumbles for a rag
To dust the pews and pulpit. A wild grouse
Drums, as he opens a shutter, looking toward
The still graveyard.

He pulls bell. Now hoofs thud, wheels whine
on gravel:

Far scattered worshippers unite their ways.
Nicholas Kintvil reins his team of bays,
Sweat-foamed from ten miles travel,
To hail Si Chard, horseback. Their tongues
unravel

A week of news, till Dan Stone backs his chaise
Against Si's cruppers. "Heigh, you thar, you
mopes!

Whar's y' hitchin' ropes?"

"Shucks, Dan, you'd oughtn't steer your rig
like that.

Thar's Nabby Morgan in Steve Lurvey's buggy.
He steers right smart." "They're gigglin'
mighty huggy

Looks like to me." "Tit's tat

With them, I guess."—"Here comes John Eal-
ing's democrat

Full up with more gals. This hot spell's too
muggy

To crowd a trap so tight. Look now, he'll spill
it!"

"Thar goes Moll Millet

"Walkin' her lone." "Jest hear Eliakim's mare
Whinny! Last month she yeaned twin fillies."

"Well, Alvin Lincoln,—fetchin' water lilies

To trim church, I declare!

You al'ays did find plenty workin' time to spare
For pretty deeds. The way is whar the will is."

“Hush! Here’s the Stanwood ladies. When
they stir,
Sweet lavender

“Seems growin’ round their feet. They ain’t
like others.”

—So teams are hitched and blanketed from gall
Of flies. Old folks in Sunday black, and small
Children held fast by mothers’
Hands, saunter toward the meeting-house,
where silence smothers
The horseshed prattle; for in his carry-all
Alone, bolt upright, leering looks adroit,
Sits Zorab Coit.

Beside the porch he tossed his reins to Stephen
And waddled out—stub-leggèd, thick of
paunch,
Pug as a woodchuck squatting up on haunch.
Under his chin, shaved even,
His white beard curled, round like a bib, and
bald as shriven

Monk was his skull. His nose stuck sharp,
and staunch
His neckbone topped his spine; but over his
priggish
Mouth, the bright piggish

Eyes slitted slant through lids of puffy skin.
Always they seemed to lurk for some surprise—
Angling, alert, yet unobtrusive eyes:

There were no comings-in
Nor goings-out but they detected secret sin
At work. "Good day, Miss Nabby; you look
wise
This mornin'." "Me, Sir?" "Wa'n't it you was
driven
Past me by Stephen?"

"Oh, Mr. Lurvey; yes, Sir. He's gone now
To hitch your team." Nab's face turned white,
then rosy.
"So he is! What's that he's fetchin' back—a
posy?"

I s'pose you don't know how
He spent last Friday evenin'? My best corn-
fed sow
Died Friday evenin'." "Oh, Sir!" "You don't
s'pose he
Knows *why* she died?" "Who—Mr. Lurvey?
Oh, Sir,
I'm sure—Oh, no, Sir."

"'Cause I saw lights go past, up Dogtown way,
'Fore nine o'clock; and there was extr
barkin'."—

"Aye, Sir, 't was Steve and Nabby: they was
sparkin'—"

"Now, Moll, how da'st you say—"

"I da'st say more what's so! 'T was Peter, too,
and they

Had Lyddy, Peg and Liz along, remarkin'
They'd go see Judy Rhines."—Steve loomed
and glared.

Moll stood, unscared.

“Well, Stephen, ain’t it so?” “Cool, now, young folks!

Keep cool! This is the Lord’s day. While that bell Still rings, we’ll stay here in the porch.—Now tell:

Is this one o’ your jokes,
Steve Lurvey?” “What you mean, Sir?”
“Tryin’ to coax
Young girls to sell their souls?” “What, me?”
“How well
Do you know Judy Rhines?”—“Leave me confess,
Nabby!—Why, yes,

“I know Jude Rhines, Sir.—She’s a witch.”

“A witch!”

The porch buzzed like a bee cloud swarming.

Young

And old stuck heads together. Each loosed a tongue:

“One night I heerd a scritch

Outen her ell." "Her broom's all wore down to
a switch."

"I set a trap nigh Tam's house—found it sprung
And *nothin' in't!*" "They're *both* queer.

What can ail 'em?"

"They knowed, down Salem."

"Ye've made a bad charge, Steve. What can
you bring

Of proof she be a witch, as you aver?"

"Hush, Nab, hush up!—This silver button, Sir.

She wears one arm in sling.

Wall, Sir, last week, I shot a crow in the left
wing

With this same button, what was *found in her
Left arm!*" "In Judy's arm?" "Yes, Sir, next
day!—

The crow flew 'way,

"But jes' next mornin' Peter called to see

Judy—" "Who—Peter Bray?" "Yes, Sir.

She said

Sence day before, her left arm felt half dead
And hurted so, that he
Lanced in her with his knife and soon he
fetched it free—

Yes, Sir, this button—silver, look! That red
Is Judy's blood ye see thar. For the rest
Axe Pete, you'd best."

The bell stopped ringing, and the iron hum
Dwindled in quivering echoes on the air.
The sudden hush struck all to silence there.

Some stole inside, but some
Waited for Zorab. "Whar's the minister?—Not
come?

This sorcery is his concern. Repair
To y' pews, my brethren. Steve and I will wait.
John Wharf is late."

Nab tugged at Stephen's sleeve. She eyed the
Elder
Whose face peered down the road. She whis-
pered quick:

“Don’t tell what *we* done, Friday night!”
—“Now, chick,
Be I a fool?” He held her
Hand, squeezing. “Nab?” But Zorab was a
master welder
Of broken question-marks. He clinched ’em,
click,
With one ear.—“Stephen ain’t *too* big a fool,
Miss Nab. Keep cool.”

Nab flustered in. Poor Stephen crumpled
under.
“The weather ’pears like storm. It’s fearful
hot.”
“’T is so,—and hotter whar there’s sin.” “I
thought
I heerd a—wa’n’t that thunder?”
“Heat lightnin’ ’s buzzin’ round a bit. And
whar, I wonder,
Is Master Wharf?” “Hemight’agone, like’s not,

To Tammy's." "Oh! So *he* was thar, o' Friday?"

"Yes, Sir." "That's tidy

"For John. And thar he comes now.—Bull o' Bashan!

Who's that awalkin' 'side of him—not Judy Rhines?" "Yep, that's her!" "Not bringin' here that goody

To meetin'! All creation

Won't stand that! Mebbe, though, he'd let the Lord's damnation

Strike her right here in church. I wonder—would he?

That man ye can't jest put your finger on.

He's young yet—John."

A little sullen breeze was slowly stirring
The smoke-bush near the porch. The sky was
dun

Above the belfry, where the nooning sun
Glared round and brassy. Whirring

Of grouse wings drumbled far; and from the
maples, chirring

Cicadas sang.—There, timid as a nun
With eyelids earthward, Judy came with her
Pale minister.

“Good morrow, Elder Coit.” “Good mornin’,
Master

Wharf.” “Good day, Stephen.” “’Day, Sir.”
John passed on

And Judy followed. Gabriel’s clarion
Could not have summoned faster

To judgment than the voice of Zorab: “For a
pastor

That’s late, you take your time this mornin’,
John.

And what might be your text?” “My text is
Sin,

Judy,—go in.”

XI

The musty gloom struck chill. Slow down the
aisle
Their black forms passed. He touched an
empty pew
And bowed. She slipt by, seated full in view
Of eyes that yield no smile
Where hers turn wistful, Gaunt he climbed
the pulpit, while
Zorab and Stephen took dim places. Through
Green shutters slitting light flecked, and one
square
Of gold fell where

A sash, half lifted, let in the hot day.
Gowns rustled faint. A child, begun to itch,
Squeaked, stifled. Through the hush a whis-
pered "Witch"

Flew hissing.—"Let us pray!

Our Father which art—" The mired souls
struggle in their clay

For Power and Glory. The thin pipe blows for
pitch.

They sing: "*Why do we mourn departing
friends?*"

The first hymn ends.

Now down the mat new boots cry creakle-creak.
Tom Stacy tiptoes, poling the Lord's platter
Along the aisle. The penny pieces patter
Like droppings from the leak
Of maple-sap in pan. Tom stops. In Judy's
cheek
The bright blood startles.—"What can be the
matter?"

Heads crane to spy. "She's dropt it in!—
 Tam's niece!
 A shilling-piece!"

Again the sudden pitch pipe, shrill and brittle,
 Sounds key: "*What scenes of horror and of
 dread,*"

They sing, "*Await the sinner's dying bed!*"

They spare no jot or tittle
 Of wrath to mix the cauldron brew of Satan's
 spittle
 To scald their sinner. Judy thinks: "The
 dead—
 The dead don't only bark for Tammy Younger
 To sate their hunger!"

John Wharf rose up. He opens the Book for
 gloss
 And text. His eyes gleam out; his jaw goes
 set.
 Under his pallor burns a purpling fret
 Of blood in double boss

High on the cheek-bone. Tongues buzz:

“Scarlet—see—a cross!”

*“He that is without sin among you, let
Him cast the first stone”*—“Aye, jest leave me
cast it!

Now watch 'er blast it!”

Crash! the great Bible skirls in air, lopsiding
Thud on the treadway. Peter's head sticks in
The window. “Make that stone your text fer
sin,

Ye crimpin', Lord-abidin'

Preach-monger!” Peter grabs the sash; he
bursts the side in

And clambers over tinkling glass. A din
Of screaming turns the church aisle to a bull-
pit.

Pete storms the pulpit

Brute-bellowing.—The bull-roar lulls and
quavers.

The sudden tumult hushes sudden—tense.

Quiet thoughts are armored against turbulence.
Before strong love, lust wavers.—
“Peter, the saving hand of Christ holds not a
slaver’s
Whip, but a flower—a gray flower. See!”
Pete’s sense
Clouds. “So, by God, you’ll try *her* tricks, is
that it?
Yon witch is at it

“Agin! The Devil grab her. Thar she sits
In meetin’. Be you God-folks goin’ t’ allow
A sluttin’ witch here?” Zorab Coit stands now
In pew. His little slits
Of eyes blaze large. “John Wharf, have you
clean lost your wits,
Or aire ye *both* blood-guilty o’ my dead sow?
If not, then what in God’s House does this
mean?”
“Her soul is clean.”

“Thar’s one jest way to clean a witch: that’s
hang ’er!”

“Her soul is clean as mine. If ye doom her,
Then first ye’ll hang John Wharf, her minister.”

“The shillin’ minx! I’d slang ’er
Up high as mast’ead.” Peter roused new cries
in clangor.

John raised the Bible high.—“The Book!
Don’t stir!”

All eyed him. (Judy crept. None saw her
thread

The gloom. She fled.)

“The Book saith: *“Heaven and earth shall
pass away*

But My words shall not pass.”—Hear them in
awe:

Love one another! That is all the law

And prophets. Love is the Way

Of Christ. This baited child hath chosen to
obey

His law, and will ye cast her forth?”—A flaw

Of pelt drops pattered the roof, and clang of
thunder

Startled their wonder:

“The witch! Where’s Judy Rhines?” “Haw-
haw!” burst Peter,

“Ye heerd that gong she answered. She’s gone
off

By lightnin’ coach to hitch up fer John Wharf
Housekeepin’, whar he’ll meet ’er

On Dogtown Common. Axe John if makin’
love ain’t sweeter

Nor makin’ sarmons!”—Zorab hacked loud
cough:

“Tomorrer, Master John, we’ll try your case.
God send ye grace!”

XII

Judy fled home. The brassy noon turned night.
Deep in the charnel sky the livid worms
Of lightning writhed and flicked. They coiled
 in squirms
 Of crawling phosphor light
Swarming the day's cadaver. In her panting
 flight
She smelt the heavy sea-brine, hot with sperms
Of balsam. Faintly came, far off, the roar
 Of throbbing shore.

Judy sped on. The blackening woodpath swallowed

Her steps. Like frightened child, groping to bed

In dark with candle out, voiceless she fled

Her fears. Behind her followed

Their voices singing "*scenes of horror and of dread.*"

The pent dark boomed—it burst! She fell.
She wallowed

In rushing slime. She rose. Her clothing hung
Soggy. It clung.

Her pained side fluttered hot, but chilling
shackles

Cramped her faint limbs. The blinding roar
still surged.—

It lulled.—It lifted.—Lonely rocks emerged

Around her. Whirling grackles

Rose screaming on the coppery clouds, and
honking cackles

Of wild geese drifted down. A fox cub verged

Her trail, and blinked. His soaked brush
draggled behind.
Meekly he whined

Where Judy patted him. But on again
She fled. At last the peak of Tammy's gable
Quickened her climbing. Hardly she was able
To push the swollen door open. Then
She drabbled in, dripping the boards. "Ha!
Wondered when
Ye'd turn up home.—Watch thar! Don't souse
the table.
Ye're soaked. Whar ben? Som'ers to fetch us
eatin'?"
"No, Aunt: to meetin'."

"Meetin'! Not 'Squam ways? Not to Zorab's
diggin'?"
Not that John Wharf—his preachin' hole?
Not *him!*
Judy, speak up!" She nodded. "No! I'll
vim!

I wouldn't a-stuck a pig in
That sty—an' *you*, my own born niece, now *you*
go priggin'
Thar! Now I'm done with ye! You kin go
swim
Your lone at Owl's Head, or down Kennebec,
Aye, drownd your neck

"Alone, fer all o' me! Ye're drownded, half,
A'ready. Sarves ye right.—Here, what y' want
With them rug rav'lin's? Have 'em? No, ye
can't,
No! Hang 'em on that gaff
Agin. And what had Min'ster John—jest leave
me laugh!
Had John ter preach?" "He spoke up for me,
Aunt."
"So *you* was his text!" "O Aunt, he spoke for
me!
If it should be

"That they would punish John Wharf, jest
for sakes

O' me, and mebbe reave away his living'
And ban him too." "Aha! That *would* be
givin'

Tit for old tat. The cakes
Would burn right-side for onct!" "The only
way it takes

To clean a witch, they said, is hang her."

"Grievin'

Christ'ans! Who said that? Old Zorobabel!
I jest could tell

"His tone o' voice.—Wall, leave 'em try it.—
Hang!

They'd need ter hang him, too,—John Wharf,
if he

Spoke up fer you." "Oh, do ye think 't would
be?

He said that, too!"—A pang
Of speechless love struck Judy white.—"You
leave him gang

His own gait. Likes o' him an' you don't gee.
 If they could git *you* riddance, they'd forgive
 John—better believe!

“And John himself 'ud axe grace. He'd deal
 ruther
 Speak up fer you at fun'ral than at meetin'.
 Oh! don't I know 'em all—the Lord's flock!
 Bleatin'

Lambs!—Leaver a black sheep smother
 Chokin', *they* would, than rub their white-
 washed wool 'gin t'other.”

Tam paused. In anger her tartness drove the
 sweet in;

But now she crooned: “Leave *me* for *them!*
 How could ye,
 Judy,—my Judy?”

Tam yearned with trembling fingers to caress
 The gleaming hair, but Judy silently
 Stole to the doorway.—“I've forgot,” said she,
 “But thar I'll remember.”—“Yes?”

Remember what?—whar?" "Over yonder."

"Change your dress

'Fore ye go out. Ye're sopped."—"The rowan
tree.

I'll find it in the ferns." "Come back. It's
drippy

Yet." "Aye, 't is slippy,

"But I won't slip, and I'll be back afore
Ye guess, mayhap—like Granny." "What's
them things

Ye're sayin'? Talk loud." "How good a tree-
toad sings

After it's over!" "Ye've tore

Your skirt—there's ravel's danglin'." Tam's
eyes could not pore

Where Judy looped the long rug ravellings

And hid them.—"Tell him, Aunt, the rowan
tree,

It's prayin'!—He

"Larned it to pray.—How slippy 't is!" "Here,
 Jude,
 Come back!" But she was gone from Tammy
 —quite
 Gone from old Tam. She crossed the foot-
 bridge, light
 Of step, but solitude
 Weighed on her heart. She sobbed. The tree-
 toads trilled. She viewed
 The rowan tree—the berries bleeding bright.
 She climbed. She slipped. Bark fell.—She
 choked.—It hung.
 The tree-toads sung.

XIII

“Tam! Tammy Younger! Tam! Where’s
Judy?” “Who
Be you, darkin’ my doors’ll?” “They’d never
have done, down
There at the church, and now it’s after sun-
down.

Where’s Judy?” “That’ll do
Fer axin’, Master Wharf. Now you kin *tell* me
—you!
Whar’s Judy?” “Tam!” “Come, ’fore your
weights all run down,
Strike time, and tell.” “*I* don’t know, Tam.
Did she—?

The rowan tree—?”

“Aye, them’s her words. ‘Tell him it’s prayin’,
she said,
‘He larned it to pray.’—To think I never
guesst
Her *him* was *you!*” “The rowan tree!” He
presst
His closed eyes. “‘They’re so red—
The berries!’—That’s what I heard her sobbing,
when I fled
Those devils, to find her. Lord! dear God!”
—“Ye’d best
Call God. He likes when dead folks—”
“Don’t! Don’t say—”
John fled away.

The footbridge creaked and swung. He felt the
path
Downward with slipping feet. Red dusk was
still.
Faintly a barking mocked the tree-toad’s trill.—

